

Tiny Dancer

Albemarle's 290 XF offers ample fishing features and a sweet ride **BY GARY CAPUTI**

WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF THE 290 XF, Albemarle has created a watch-pocket express with rough-water handling capabilities that put it in a class by itself. Our day started at the Stuart, Florida Boat Show where the 290 was tied up alongside its larger siblings. It's the spitting image of the 330, scaled down in length and beam but sharing the tall bow, wide flare, steep sheer and large windshield. The optional powder-blue hull, hardtop and tower were nice touches, although towers on small boats can affect handling and accentuate roll. That concern would be put to rest shortly. The optional transom door was mounted on external hinges that jutted out from an otherwise smooth transom.

TEST CONDITIONS



LOCATION: Intracoastal Waterway, North Palm Beach, Florida
WIND: NW, 15 to 20 knots
SEA STATE: 2-foot chop
TEST LOAD: 240 gallons of fuel, three adults
 Measurements taken by the author using a handheld GPS.

Our plan was to buy live goggle-eyes on the way out and then fish from St. Lucie Inlet to Singer Island, 32 miles to the south, where the boat would take up residence at Sailfish Marina. The northwest wind at 15 to 20 knots was forecast to increase throughout the day, stacking up the seas into the northward push of the Gulf Stream: ideal test conditions. I was joined by Ted Haigler from Albemarle and Capt. Jamie Brandon from Tuppen's Marine, one of their Sunshine State dealers. Haigler briefed me on some of the 290's hull features, like its ag-

gressive entry, wide bow flare, 21-degree deadrise and deep prop pockets. When he turned the keys, the Yanmar turbo diesels responded with a pleasant growl before settling into a smooth idle while we slipped the lines. As we approached the inlet, Haigler got on the VHF and called for a live-bait boat. No response meant we'd be trolling dead bait.

We cruised to the inlet at 24 knots, burning about 20 GPH, respectable for a deep-V hull with a loaded displacement around 13,500 pounds. Running offshore, we took the 2- to 4-foot seas on the beam, but the 290 proved stable with minimum roll, seemingly unaffected by the tower. About six miles out, Haigler turned down-sea while Brandon and I put out a spread. The little express trolled the following sea nicely, but our baits failed to interest even the local dolphin population.

After a few hours without a knockdown, I suggested we see how the boat ran in the slop. With approval from my hosts, I hopped behind the wheel and gave the electronic



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SPECIFICATIONS

ALBEMARLE 290XF
 LOA: 30'6" w/PULPIT ; 28'6" w/o BEAM: 10'9" DRAFT: 32"
 DEADRISE: 21° DISPL.(DRY): 12,500 LBS. COCKPIT: 62 SQ. FT.
 WATER: 28 GALS. FUEL: 265 GALS. PRICE: \$304,230
 W/TWIN 315-HP YANMAR 6LPA-STP DIESELS
 Albemarle Sportfishing Boats • 252.482.7600 • albemarleboats.com



PERFORMANCE

RPM	KNOTS	GPH
2,700	16.4	13.0
3,000	21.6	17.6
3,300	24.3	20.4
3,600	28.5	30.5
3,800 (WOT)	31.2	34.8

TEST POWER: TWIN 315-HP YANMAR 6LPA-STP DIESELS

throttles a healthy shove. The 290 responded briskly to commands and put on an impressive seakeeping demonstration. Running down-sea at 24 knots was no challenge. The boat rose on waves, dipped gently into the deep trough and came up piercing the top half of the next, the flare throwing walls of spray to the sides. Turning beam-to, she stayed on top, requiring course corrections only when angling down wave faces.

Since down-sea antics seemed no match for the 290, I reversed course and ran straight into what were now 4- to 6-footers with white caps as far as the eye could see. We should have been crawling, but 15 knots was no problem, and breaking 20 knots was surprisingly manageable with just a little throttle and tab adjustment. Throughout the rough-water test, the 290 held its bow up in typical Albemarle fashion and never pounded. Back inside on the Intracoastal, we ran speed tests, managing a respectable 31 knots at WOT and finding an economical 1.4 MPG cruise speed just under 25 knots.

Inside, the 290's tall bow gives the nicely appointed cabin plenty of headroom. The comfy bench seats and dinette table convert into a V-berth. The minimalist galley includes



a sink, microwave and refrigerator to port. A private head with sink and shower is behind a door to starboard. The cabinetry and wood trim are tastefully done, and there is storage space in drawers, in a small closet and under the bow seats.

The 62-square-foot cockpit features a 21-gallon livewell to port and a three-drawer tackle-prep station to starboard of the helm step-up. There's a 43-gallon in-deck fish box and another in the transom. An aluminum mounting plate for a chair is molded into the deck, and four rod holders adorn the gunwales. Freshwater and saltwater washdowns come standard. The helm seating includes a pair of Pompanette chairs and two jump seats with insulated ice chests underneath. Electronics are mounted in a pod that drops out of sight when not in use, and the single-lever electronic controls and aluminum wheel complete the helm.

The 290 XF is sure to please Albemarle aficionados while attracting a new generation of anglers to the brand. Entrusted to uphold a 30-year reputation for tough, seaworthy fish boats, it not only carries on the tradition, but also ups the ante for all that follow. ~